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About the research
Background

Infrastructure Victoria want to understand Victorians’ attitudes, perceptions and factors which will influence the success of various potential kerbside waste sorting / collection initiatives. The research will inform Infrastructure Victoria’s advice to Government on recycling and resource recovery infrastructure, due in April 2020.

In June 2019, Infrastructure Victoria undertook a community survey to understand, at a high level, Victorians’ perception of recycling and their willingness to change household behaviours. The polling demonstrated Victorians had a high appetite for various potential kerbside waste sorting / collection initiatives.

This subsequent qualitative deep dive sought to obtain more discerning feedback once householders understood the implications of the schemes.
Research objectives

The specific objectives of the project were to:

1. Understand awareness, attitudes and perceptions of current kerbside waste sorting / collection practices, including factors which may limit more complete adherence.

2. Explain why initial receptiveness to proposed new kerbside waste initiatives polled as high.

3. Explore how thoughts develop as new information is added about the implications of proposed new initiatives.

4. Investigate the level of motivation to adhere to new initiatives and what is underlying that motivation. Conversely, what will limit adherence and how this can be addressed.

5. Compare initiatives against one another to conclude which represent the best strategic opportunities for Government.
Who we spoke to

A total of n=44 focus group participants:

- Victorians aged 18+, who are responsible for managing / sorting waste for their household.
- A mix of genders and life-stage / household composition.
- Each participant completed a 15-minute homework task consisting of questions related to awareness of council collections, and perceptions towards waste sorting practices prior to the focus groups. Groups lasted 90 minutes.
- Groups were conducted over three evenings on 12th – 14th November 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Bendigo</td>
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Note that, to facilitate a shared discussion, and to highlight where there are differences in perspective, groups were split between those who do / do not completely adhere to current waste sorting practices.

The project was carried out in line with the Market Research International Standard, AS ISO 20252.
Who we spoke to

Participants were sampled to reflect a range of demographic characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Gender</th>
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<td>Port Phillip</td>
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Victorians from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds were included in the research.
Detailed findings
Drivers and barriers to adherence
Victorians feel a sense of duty to the environment

Informed by a broad range of sources, they are concerned about the environment and feel it is important to take actions to minimise their impact.

Some are more committed – they are more cognisant of the impact of environmental issues, have well established sorting habits, and are willing to go out of their way to seek ways to recycle or create their own sorting systems. At the apex, the most committed already take non-kerbside waste to collection centres and upcycling programs within their community.

Those who are less active – rather than dismissing the environment entirely – feel a sense of duty to do ‘the right thing’ but just don’t do it consistently or don’t prioritise it over other factors such as convenience.

“Too much of our waste goes to landfill and impacts on our environment. It just isn’t right.”
The positive habits of those committed to correctly sorting waste are deeply ingrained

Rather than having a rational basis, those committed to correctly sorting waste cite a broad emotional connection to ‘the environment’, and are compelled to ‘do the right thing’ by habit:

‘It’s who I am’
Environmentally conscious – positive waste sorting practices are just one expression of this audience’s interest in minimising their footprint. They commonly describe caring for the environment and taking positive steps as part of how they self-identify.

‘It has been instilled in me’
It is common for Victorians to describe that waste sorting behaviors have been habitual for such a long time, that they are now second nature. The systems they used when growing up tend to have translated into the systems they are using nowadays. This is especially true of younger audiences who may never have known any differently.

‘I have an obligation not just to myself but to others’
They have a more developed social conscience and a broader sense of social responsibility. A part of this persuasion is to place higher importance / priority on the environment.
Recycling for me is just automatic. It’s part of who I am. I don’t plan it, it just happens.
Mature Victorians and those living in regional areas have higher tendency to adhere to current waste sorting practices

I have the time and space to make it a priority

Mature Victorians are are less time pressured so face fewer barriers to sorting their waste correctly and consistently.

They also have more consistent, structured lifestyles, so their waste generation is less likely to change and they are less likely to be in situations where their waste collection system is insufficient (e.g. overfilling of the recycling bin).

Compared to metro residents, regional residents have more space - giving them more freedom to sort their waste as they wish before collection and to keep their waste separated into different streams (e.g. kitchen caddy for food waste, extra bins / storage indoor for recyclables, etc).

They are also less concerned about having to store their dry recyclables for an extra week / wait for next collection. Regional residents are more likely to engage in more ‘drop-off’ behaviours, made easier by their proximity to these centres compared to Metro residents and the predictability of traffic congestion.
Environmental concerns alone cannot dependably drive engagement with waste sorting practices

It is common for Victorians to put environmental concerns to the back of their mind in the face of other more pressing day-to-day matters.

For those who don’t consistently adhere to waste sorting practices, other concerns more personal to them, such as careers, caring for their families, or staying healthy, take up the majority of their focus. This results in little room for conscious thought about the environment in their everyday behaviours.

“It takes too long to work out what can and can’t go into each bin. I have three kids at home, I just want to get the trash out of my house, I have other things I need to focus on.”
Uncertainty creates misconceptions about how the system works and negatively impacts commitment to sorting

Victorians generally associate certain items as ‘obviously recyclable’ – for example, plastic bottles, dry cardboard and glass. However, there is a ‘grey area’ between what they know can definitely be recycled and what can’t. In this grey area, they are left to their own accord to figure out how they should dispose of the waste. Those not inclined to proactively seek clarity on how to sort waste likely do the wrong thing much of the time in one of two ways...

‘It’s better to be safe than sorry’

When unsure, they may dispose of the item in the landfill bin. The main reason for this is a concern that if anything non-recyclable was included among a batch of recyclable items, it would mean the entire batch would go to landfill as a result of the non-recyclable item ‘contaminating’ the others.

‘Let the system take care of it’

Alternatively, they may dispose of the item in the recycling bin. They believe that sorting out non-recyclable waste is one of Council’s roles and that recycling facilities cater for this. Further, they believe that at least attempting to recycle an item is better than the certainty of it going to landfill by putting it in the general waste bin.

They reject the ‘myth’ that one non-recyclable item means a whole batch of items cannot be recycled.
I try to sort our rubbish into the correct bins, but it's just too hard. I can never get it right so I get fed up and just chuck it in whatever.

When my red bin is full I put my nappies in the recycling bin. I feel a bit guilty but ultimately I don’t have time to think about it for long.
Victorians do not suffer a dysfunctional system – if it doesn’t work efficiently, they revert to whatever is most convenient

- A common hurdle to sorting waste properly is recycling bins filling too quickly. This could be due to them being collected too infrequently or being too small, along with potential variability in the amount of recyclable waste week to week (i.e. bulky boxes, glass bottles following social events).

- In both cases, this leads to recyclable items ‘overspilling’ and being placed in general waste. Relatively few are willing to hold onto it at home between collections. Some residents mentioned using their neighbours’ bins to dispose of excess waste, which helped to maintain the integrity of the sorted waste.

  We can fill up the whole recycling bin in one week, but it only gets collected fortnightly. The only thing we can do is put them into the red bin (general waste bin). We don’t have any other space.

- Negative previous experiences with recyclables collection (e.g. delayed pick-up, missed collection) and its repercussions (e.g. bins overfilling, smells, etc.) can lead to mistrust in the system. As a result, this led to residents using what is most convenient to them rather than adhering to sorting practices.

  The council missed our organics bin once. We had to keep the organic waste for another fortnight. It was disgusting. Now we put everything into the general waste bin to avoid the hassle of it.
Families and those living in multi-unit developments are less likely to adhere to current waste sorting practices

We’re busy and our bins are insufficient

Apart from being time-poor, families generally consume more (therefore producing more waste), are more active, and have less structured lifestyles – these factors combine to make waste sorting more burdensome to get right.

When recyclable waste generation ‘overspills’ capacity, they have minimal time or space to do anything but put items into their general waste bins.

It takes us more time and effort than others

Accessing bins typically requires descending stairs and/or walking to the carpark or other designated area outside of their building – requiring additional time and effort. Putting recyclables in a single in-home general waste bin is the easiest available solution. To sort and carry waste separately is a much higher burden on this cohort.

What’s the point if other residents aren’t doing it

Seeing neighbors not recycling properly in shared bins is a self-reinforcing cycle. It undermines belief in the effectiveness of their own sorting behaviors and ‘normalises’ that not sorting properly is okay. In particular, those who perceive that one contamination results in everything going to landfill become disenfranchised when neighbours do not sort correctly.
Reactions to initiatives
Three critical success factors for adhering to new sorting practices

1. **Frictionless**
   Victorians are resistant to new initiatives which are complex, or which require undue time and effort. For example, where there is confusion about what goes where, taking waste to a centralised location, or opting-in for ad-hoc collections.

2. **Clear environmental benefits**
   Victorians want to know there is a *reason* to sorting waste out into separate streams. The most compelling reason / benefit is that which relates to the environment. For example, ‘by reducing the contamination incurred by co-mingled bins, we can keep closer to 100% of what gets sorted out of landfill’.

3. **Consistently functional**
   Bin capacity and collection frequency must be supported with the right infrastructure to prevent ‘overspilling’ and users becoming disenfranchised from the new system.
Victorians are broadly open to collection services for separate waste streams

- **Separate glass**
- **Separate organics**
- **Separate paper**

Further separating waste intuitively builds on what people are already doing. In some cases, it is seen as simplifying recycling by making it clearer what does / does not go where.

Fundamental to the acceptability of this initiative is the communication of why it is important. Explanations relating to reducing burden on recycling centres and reducing cross-contamination to increase the proportion of sorted waste which gets effectively recycled are easily understood and well received.

It is anticipated that guidelines will be provided for clarification on which items can be placed into the bins (e.g. can magazines be placed into ‘paper collection’, can meat or bones be placed into ‘organics collections’, etc.) and standards of practice (e.g. the extent to which glass needs to be clean / dry).

The issue of collection frequency for organics is front of mind, with concerns raised that infrequent collections would result in build-up of smells and attract pests.

“I’m happy to separate if I know that it is making it more likely to get recycled. It’s silly that it’s all mixed and all the time it must later take to sort… It’s not that hard to separate it in the first place.”

= broadly accepted
Separation of nappies is acceptable in principle, but raises doubts which would need to be answered

Separate nappies

Separate nappies is a great idea if they are able to recycle the materials from it.

There’s probably only one or two houses on each street that needs the nappies collection, but it would mean getting extra trucks to collect them. Seems like a waste of resources.

There is no intuitive understanding for why there would be a desire to sort and collect nappies separately.

The logistics and additional resources required to implement separate nappy collection is seen as unnecessary and a burden to the council as it would only be applicable to a small proportion of households in Victoria. This raises significant doubt.

However, families with young children are willing to separate nappies if that is what is needed to improve outcomes. They do not strongly object to doing so.

Clear communication about the benefit of nappy separation would be essential. Ultimately, community uncertainty and doubt about this initiative may make it a lesser opportunity for Government than other types of waste stream sorting.
Reducing services causes some tension but can be acceptable within a revised system

- **Smaller general waste bins**

- **Lower frequency of collection**

On instinct, Victorians reject reduction in their bin capacity and collection frequency – anticipating build-up of smells and attraction of pests as a result.

However, once explained that increased sorting would lead to lower volume of general waste, acceptance (somewhat reluctantly) becomes more widespread.

Communicating reasons / benefits of having smaller general waste bins and lower frequency of collection as well as how general waste collection fits within the revised system will be crucial to successful implementation and adoption.

The capacity of the other waste stream bins must also be sufficient and collected frequently (esp. the organics bin), otherwise residents will resort to placing waste into whichever bins have space.

The appropriate framing is ‘phasing out of larger general rubbish bins’, to avoid those residents who already have a smaller bin fearing they will be affected to the point where it becomes unfeasible.

"I can’t go smaller. My bin’s always full because I put everything in there."

"The organics bin still needs to be collected weekly. If not, it would be disgusting. If I was separating glass it would take ages to build up so fortnightly would be fine."

= triggers initial resistance, but may be accepted with caveats
Although acceptable in principle, variable rate charging raises considerable criticism which would need to be addressed

Variable rate charging

✓/✗️ = divisive, may be acceptable to some with caveats but is rejected by others

I recycle most of my waste. I only take out my general waste bin once a month, having variable charges would work in my favour.

Households with kids are likely to create more waste. Charging them for having more waste is like penalizing them for having kids.

Those in smaller households, who already adhere to waste sorting practices, and who believe they would be better-off under the scheme, are inclined to support it on the basis they think it’s ‘fair’.

Those in larger households, especially those who are also disinclined to sort properly, strongly oppose the system, believing they are being ‘unavoidably punished’ by their circumstance.

Overall, the proposition raises significant cynicism, with Victorians rejecting that any resident would be able to save money. There is a widespread mistrust of Government to roll-out the scheme in such a way that anyone was made better-off in the long-term.

Misuse of the system, e.g. neighbours putting waste into each others’ bins to minimise their own charges, is also a significant concern.
Opt-in collection is an example of where, by making the system more complex, Victorians are liable to become non-compliant

Opt-in collection

This seems like a huge pain. Let alone remembering to put the bins out, now I have to remember to order the bin service. I would very much object to this.

Rather than opting-in for collection service, resident prefer to opt-out when they don’t require the service as the perceived frequency of having to opt-in is likely to be too burdensome.

Victorians anticipate that a wait-time between opting in and the bins being collected would create issues as bins overflow due to their own forward-planning oversights. The outcome of this would be recyclables going into general rubbish.

The proposed scheme also raises significant cynicism about the resource cost of trucks doing ad-hoc rounds where they only collect from nominated households. A question raised is whether there would be more trucks, coming more often, to enable this patchy service.

= broadly not accepted
The perceived effort of using a centralised drop-off is rejected by mainstream of Victorians

Centralized drop-off points for multiple waste streams in residential areas

What about wet weather? Or the elderly? You’d have to drag all this rubbish behind you, how is that feasible?

I think we’re really lazy here in Australia. We’re used to people picking up our rubbish from our doorstep and keeping our streets clean. We’re not ready for this.

Centralized drop-off points for multiple waste streams in residential areas in lieu of kerbside collection services is viewed as requiring ‘too much effort’ – having to transport their waste from their home to the centralized locations.

This initiative is received negatively by both those who are currently committed to recycling and those who are sorting infrequently. This initiative is viewed as only relevant to residents in multi-units developments as it is similar to their current collection systems.

For the uncommitted who currently receive kerbside collection services, having to transport their waste further than where they currently do will further de-motivate them to adhere. Similarly, potential exposure to others not adhering to sorting practices may also lead to demotivate to try to adhere.
Infrastructure Victoria, Kerbside Collection Deep Dive, Nov 2019 27

Container deposit scheme (CDS) is appealing in theory, but Victorians do not see themselves using the service

Container deposit scheme (CDS)

Victorians are partly familiar with the concept of container deposit schemes and aware they’re operated in other States. Having Victoria catch-up to this national effort is appealing in theory, however they do not seem themselves using the initiative.

Extra effort is required to store the containers at home and take them to the CDS. Willingness to do so is negatively influenced when people have smaller living spaces, are time-poor, and/or predict heavy traffic between them and the CDS.

The proposed financial incentive (10 cents) is viewed by individuals as nominal and not warranting the efforts required to return their own bottles and cans, especially among those not committed to recycling. The incentive is seen as suitable for encouraging kids and financially vulnerable individuals, but not for the general population.

Kerbside collection is the preferred option for bottles and cans. Furthermore, when the range of kerbside collection options were presented (with separate glass collection) this solution was seen to be redundant.

This is like the centralized drop-off idea only there’s a 10 cent incentive. 10 cents might encourage some people but definitely not me.

I’d be happy if other people did this but I wouldn’t bother myself.

= An appealing proposition in principle, but actual usage questionable
Optimal configuration
Victorians are receptive to increasing waste separation streams as long as the system is consistently functional

With the underlying desire to do the right thing for the environment, Victorians are willing to increase their waste sorting behaviours and welcome initiatives that make waste sorting easier and more intuitive.

As long as they have an understanding of the importance of separate waste streams and minimal effort required from them (e.g. easy to classify, not having to go to centralised locations, and collected often enough, does not take up too much room, etc.), they are open to separating glass, paper and organics.

Three considerations are considered critical to successful implementation:

- Organic waste needs to be collected most frequently (ideally weekly).
- A compelling narrative on the reasons / benefits of separate waste streams.
- Clear guidelines on which items should go into which bin.

Further considerations may affect the roll-out:

- Individuals develop their own methods of sorting and storing waste indoors before it goes to respective kerbside bins. Increased separation may mean residents need to create / adopt a new storage system indoors. They may be happy to store dry recyclable items indoors but not others. New sorting initiatives may need to be introduced gradually to allow residents time to adapt.
- Separate waste stream collection is more burdensome for residents in high density developments. It may be more readily accepted if it first becomes normalised among the wider community.
- There’s concern that increasing the amount of kerbside collection services will come at an increased cost to residents. Impact on council rates needs to be reasonable otherwise dissatisfaction could motivate defiance towards the system.
Discussion guide
Infrastructure Victoria, Kerbside Collection Deep Dive, Nov 2019

Page 1

Discuss as a group:
- Why did you manage kerbside waste in this way?
  - How do you assess kerbside waste?
  - What do you do about disposing of kerbside waste in this way?
  - Do you understand kerbside waste?

- What is the main reason for managing kerbside waste in this way?
  - What would make kerbside waste easier to manage?

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  - What would make kerbside waste easier to manage?

New initiatives concept testing - 8-10 minutes

Objectives evaluate new initiatives, and explore motivations and barriers to usage / adherence.
- How did you hear about any other ways to manage kerbside waste in this way?
  - What are your thoughts on it?
  - What do you like about this way of managing kerbside waste?
  - What are your dislike about it?

Now we would like to get your feedback on a number of different kerbside collection initiatives.

Q1. Which would you like to see implemented in your household?
- Paper collection
- Food collection

Q2. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q3. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q4. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q5. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q6. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q7. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q8. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q9. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q10. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q11. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q12. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q13. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q14. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q15. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q16. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q17. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?

Q18. What are your thoughts on this initiative?
- What do you like about this initiative?
- What do you dislike about this initiative?
Infrastructure Victoria,
Kerbside Collection Deep Dive, Nov 2019

Page 3

- What were your first thoughts on this?
  - Have you heard of this way of managing or sorting waste before?
  - What types of questions come to mind?
  - What do you like/dislike about it?
  - What don’t you like about it?
  - This was new to you, would you use it? Why/why not?
  - What would drive you to use it (what is currently unmet or your current kerbside collection satisfaction) are too?
  - What are your fears/worries about this? From using it to being new?
  - What would you need to encourage you to use it?

Specific preferences:

Note to moderator: For pricing questions, try to gauge approximate price acceptance. If respondents do not know their rates and cannot give a clear indication of a price willing to pay, move on to next question/concept.

Organics (food waste) collection

- How often would you expect this to be collected?
- Would you be prepared to pay for this kerbside collection service if it was collected weekly?
- Are you familiar with a compost bin that was provided with the kitchen caldy, what are your thoughts on it?

Organic collection:

- How often do you currently dispose of organics?
- Would you be prepared to use this kerbside collection service if it was collected weekly?
- Of the two options (collection co, drop-off), which do you prefer? Why?

Compostable bags for household that generate organics waste

- Would this encourage you to sort even after your mistake?
- Would this encourage you to generate less waste?
- How much lower in council charges would you expect?

Reduced collection times

- For a kerbside collection (frequency option): What frequency would you expect?
- Of the two options (lower collection frequency or a drop collection), which do you prefer? Why?

After all questions have been discussed:

- Thinking about your household, which of these do you want your council to offer?
- Information to show different combinations with the group if applicable, for each combination separately discuss:
  - Why these services?
Stimulus shown
## Container deposit scheme (CDS)
- You can return empty bottles and cans to return points and receive a 10 cent refund for each container.
- Return points will be located at your local supermarket (e.g. Coles, Woolworths).

## Organics (food and garden) bin
- A separate kerbside bin for organics.
- E.g. food waste / seniors and garden waste.

## Paper collection
- A separate kerbside bin for paper products.

## Nappies collection
- A separate bin for nappies which could either be collected kerbside or dropped-off.

## Kitchen caddy
- A kitchen caddy to collect all food waste from your home. It is small and can be placed easily. The food waste from your kitchen caddy should then be transferred into the larger kerbside organics bin, which you put out for collection.

## Glass collection
- A separate kerbside bin for glass products.

## Smaller general waste bin
- Instead of your regular general waste bin, you would receive a smaller kerbside bin as waste in the garbage bin would be significantly reduced if separate bins were provided for recyclables that can be taken out of the garage bin.

## Smaller general waste bin w/ Lower council charges
- Instead of your regular general waste bin (landfill), you would receive a smaller kerbside bin as waste in the garbage bin would be significantly reduced if separate bins were provided for recyclables that can be taken out of the garbage bin.
- Lower council charges for households that generate less waste (to incentivise waste reduction).

## Modified collection times
- **Option 1**: Lower frequency of collections
  - Reduction in frequency of collections for the garbage bin (landfill), e.g. reduction from weekly to biweekly collection, is around for the fact that the garbage bin might generate less waste if organics are collected separately.

- **Option 2**: Opt-in collection
  - "You would use software to opt-in for separations whenever your garbage bins are full.
  - "The changes would vary based on frequency of collection requested.

## Centralised, drop-off points for multiple waste streams in residential areas
- **Centralised**, drop-off points located 25 – 50 meters away from your home.
- "You would be able to dispose multiple types of waste, i.e. general landfill waste, recyclables, organics waste, etc.
- As the council would be able to do fewer collections, your rates would be cheaper.

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Infrastructure Victoria,
Kerbside Collection Deep Dive, Nov 2019